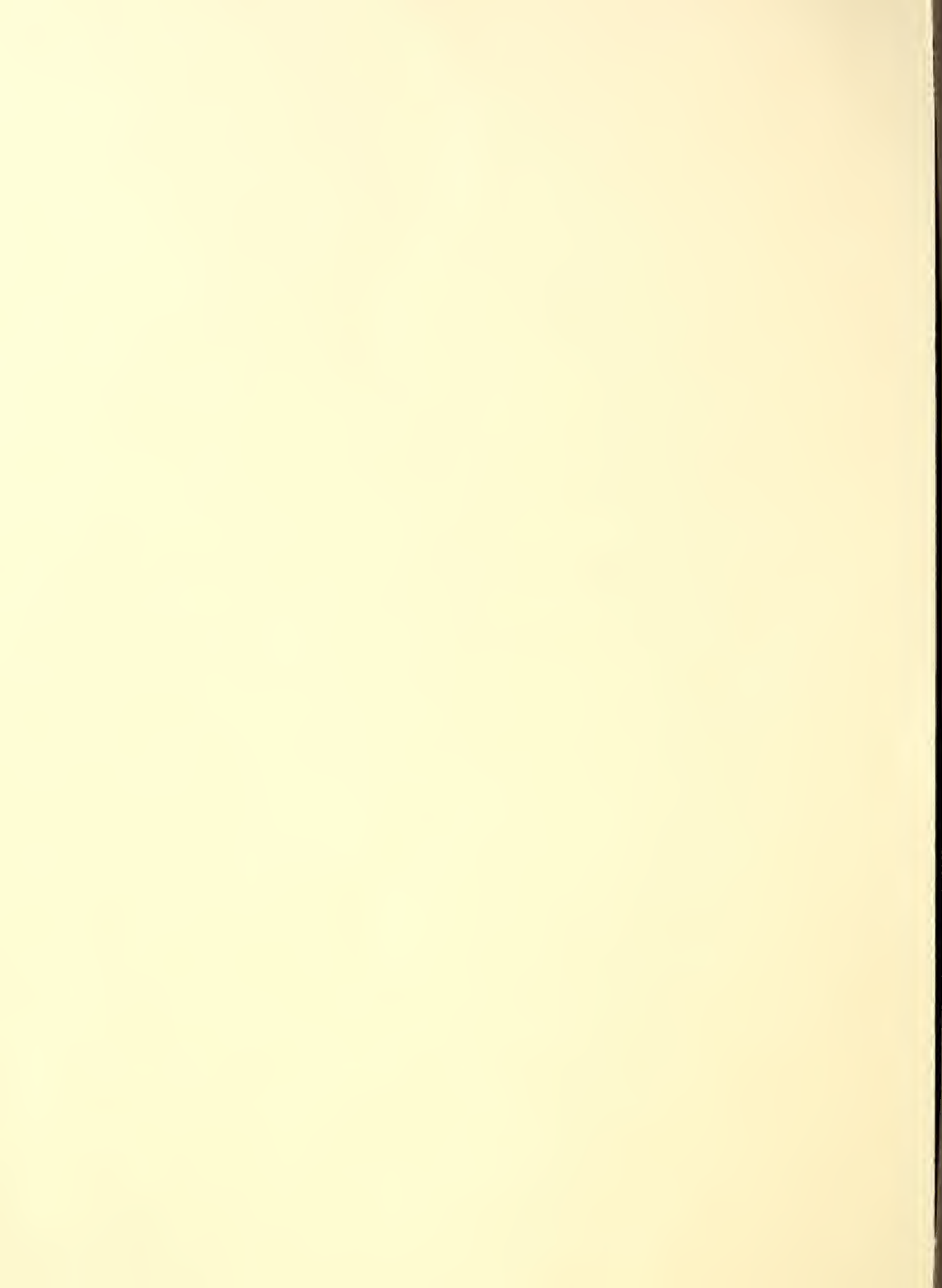


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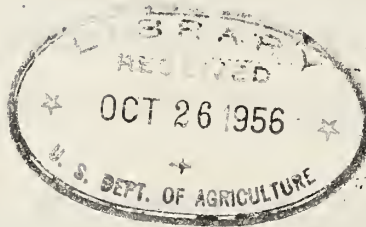
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C O N S E R V A T I O N

United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Conservation Program Service  
Washington, D. C. - December 1955

## THE AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION PROGRAM

The year 1955 completed 20 years of work under the Agricultural Conservation Program. During that time, farmers and ranchers have carried out conservation practices of considerable magnitude in cooperation with the public through the ACP.

Here are some examples of the conservation work accomplished. The figures are cumulative totals of such work done from 1936 through 1954. Such data for 1955 is not yet available.

### Examples of 19 years of Conservation

Terracing for Erosion Control: 22 million acres of cropland terraced. 110,000 miles of diversion and spreader terraces for erosion and water control.

Contour Farming: 5 million acres of contour stripcropping established.

Sod Waterways to Dispose of Excess Water Without Erosion: 230,000 miles of sod waterways averaging 15 feet wide.

Range and Pasture Improvement by Proper Distribution of Livestock: 1,100,000 water structures to distribute grazing in a manner to prevent erosion and depletion.

Conservation of Irrigation Water: 6,500,000 acres of irrigated land leveled to prevent erosion and to conserve limited supplies of irrigation water.

Forestry: 1,318,000 acres of forest trees planted. 740,000 acres of timber stands improved.

Drainage: 34,000,000 acres of farmlands improved by drainage structures so that conservation systems of farming could be established.

The Agricultural Conservation Program is a means by which the public through its Government shares the cost with farmers and ranchers of conservation practices 1) that are needed, and 2) that would not be carried out to a desired extent by farmers themselves using only their own resources.

### Kinds of Practices in Current Programs

The ACP offers cost-sharing on three groups of practices in current programs:

Conservation practices with enduring benefits:

For establishing permanent protective vegetative cover including forest trees.

For improving and protecting established vegetative cover including forest stands.

For conserving and disposing of water.

Conservation practices with benefits of limited duration:

For establishing temporary protective vegetative cover.

For temporary protection of soil from wind and water erosion.

Conservation practices with limited area of usefulness:

For meeting special new or emergency county conservation problems.

### Practices Meet Conservation Problems

ACP practices sometimes bring immediate benefit to the individual farm, but often are only in the public interest and don't return farm dividends for years .... if ever. For example, erosion control dams or other erosion control structures often provide more benefit and protection to off-the-farm resources than to the farm on which they are carried out. Cost-sharing is limited to practices 1) that conserve agricultural soil and water resources in which the public as a whole has a vital interest, and 2) which farmers would not carry out without cost-sharing.

Irrigation practices under the program, for example, are for conserving limited water supplies on lands now being irrigated and not for establishing new irrigation systems. Cost-sharing assistance offered for drainage is to provide adequate drainage on land now farmed so that other needed practices or rotations can be carried out and is not for bringing water-logged land into production. Lime and fertilizers are eligible for ACP assistance only when used 1) in establishing or maintaining erosion preventing cover, or 2) establishing soil conserving rotations of vegetative cover.

To meet most conservation problems, farmers are encouraged to carry out advanced types of conservation. However, such practices are expensive for farmers to carry out. They may require the use of expensive machinery or materials. They may result in a longer rotation or a less intensive use of land, which means a lower income.

Some practices such as temporary vegetative cover used as green manure, yield a return of costs through increased income in a few years. But others, such as terracing needed to prevent serious loss of soil resources, increase returns very slowly or may never return their costs. Some of these "slow return" practices are most vital in preserving soil resources for future use. For this reason rates of cost sharing are varied according to the incentive needed to get desired practices carried out. Cost share rates usually represent about half the cost. However, higher rates are permitted where needed to get desirable practices carried out.

#### Land Use Adjustment Early Aim of ACP

From 1936 to 1942, land use adjustment was one of the major objectives of the ACP. Intensive cropping was then considered to be the greatest problem. Therefore, a program was developed to take land out of cultivated crops and small grains, and to encourage its use in grass and other soil and water conserving crops.

At the same time, financial assistance was available for achieving farm conservation goals established by county committees. These goals consisted of a specific amount of conservation work and were for 1) erosion controlling structures and cultural practices, 2) proper pasture and range management to control erosion and strengthen the vegetative cover by a) applying minerals to sod crops, and b) by seeding additional lands not needed for crop production into sod crops.

The early ACP was somewhat elementary when weighed against standards of today. Much less was known then about methods for meeting conservation problems successfully. Research in 1) the treatment of conservation problems of farm land, and 2) on the structures needed to control erosion and conserve water has made great progress since that time.

This was also about the time when the farm demonstration area was first used by SCS and TVA to put into practice then-known facts about conservation that had been developed by research. Demonstrations helped farmers to see how they worked under practical farm conditions.

During this early period, parity or income supplement payments were also made to farmers who observed acreage allotments. While attempting to improve farmers' income situations, these payments also gave added impetus to land use adjustment objectives.

The pre-World War II ACP greatly accelerated the early conservation efforts of this Department by speeding up farmers' use of much needed conservation practices and by obtaining rapid adoption of needed land use adjustments.

### 1938 Act and War Shifted ACP Objectives

The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 was intended to take over, and did take over much of the ACP responsibility for crop acreage adjustment. For example, marketing quotas. But by the time the Act of 1938 became fully operative the war came. During the period of the war and the period of high exports after the war, ACP was used as a means of obtaining conservation in the use of land while it was needed and used for intensive crop production.

The use of lime and phosphate was not limited to the control of erosion. They were pushed for use on sod crops to increase or maintain yields under intensive cropping. They also served to permit shortening of crop rotations.

Conservation practices that required scarce machinery and fuel and scarce manpower were almost out of the question during the war emergency. There was a war to be won. Every acre was pushed to contribute its part. So ACP shared the cost of minerals and seed to get a good rotation so the land could be used more intensively.

To a considerable extent, the pre-war program was put in reverse. Instead of influencing a less intensive use of land, the ACP was, by necessity, used to conserve soil during intensive land use and high production.

Administrative emphasis was placed on the types of practices that gave quick production increases during both World War II and the period of the Korean war although practices offered were not much changed.

### Resumed Emphasis on Enduring Practices

Since 1952 and especially for the 1954, 1955 and 1956 programs, ACP has stressed the carrying out of longer lasting types of practices. Erosion control, water impounding and water saving structures, and establishment of permanent vegetative cover practices are again stressed.

The services of SCS, Forest Service and other technicians are utilized to the utmost in planning and laying out practices which require these technical determinations. Soil tests to determine the amount of minerals which must be supplied to obtain adequate erosion controlling cover and proper rotations are required.

### Emergency Programs of Recent Years

During recent years there have been special programs for emergency work for which additional funds have been authorized. The Farmland Restoration Program assisted in the cleaning up and rehabilitation of farmland damaged by floods in Central and Western states in 1951, 1952 and 1953.

In 1954 and 1955 emergency programs were carried out to control wind erosion in the Great Plains dust areas. Additional funds were also obtained this fall to help restore to productive use farm land damaged by 1955 hurricanes and excessive flood waters.

### Conservation Services In USDA

The U. S. Department of Agriculture conservation services, of both direct and indirect help to farmers, include 1) Research, 2) Education, 3) Technical services, 4) Credit, and 5) Cost-sharing. The Agricultural Conservation Program is the cost-sharing part. These various services stand alone and yet are interdependent. The ACP is directly interwoven closely with other agencies because the responsibility for its development and operation is held jointly by several agencies working in co-operation with the Agricultural Conservation Program Service in Washington and with the Agricultural Soil Conservation Committees in the States, counties and Insular Areas.

WHAT THE ACP IS AND IS NOT

ACP IS

- (1) Is a means for getting more conservation on individual farms in the public interest than would be possible were farmers to depend entirely on their own resources.
- (2) Is a program to which participating farmers as taxpayers contribute two ways: (a) As taxpayers, they pay part of the Government's cost-share; they receive about four percent of the national income and pay about five percent of the personal income taxes. (b) Under the regular ACP, they pay a substantial portion of the cost of the practices, contribute their own labor and often use their own equipment.
- (3) Is a democratic process. Most of its planning and operation is in the hands of farmers. There are more than 9,000 county committeemen and more than 89,000 community committeemen.

ACP IS NOT

- (1) Is not a hand-out, rural welfare, or income supplement program.
- (2) Is not a program for making large payments to farmers. Cost-shares to participating farmers average about \$100 per farmer per year.
- (3) Is not a production adjustment device, but it can supplement production adjustment by increasing conservation on acres taken out of production.
- (4) Is not a farm plan, but can help to carry out a farm plan.
- (5) Does not consider getting practices established as the end result - - - - rather as the means for getting conservation.



